Love Your Enemies

Red Wednesday, celebrated every last Wednesday of November (before the solemnity of Christ the King), is a grim reminder that Christianity is still suffering from persecution. Pope Francis wrote that there are more Christians today who have suffered and died for their faith than during the time of the early Christians. To celebrate Red Wednesday is to live today the words of Jesus about loving enemies, not returning offenses, not succumbing to the temptation of vengeance. We are enjoined to celebrate the joy of love that these modern martyrs witness to, a love that does not include any taint of hatred against their torturers and killers. The words of the survivors rest not on the cry for justice, but on their joy of having lost their body parts or even their very lives for Jesus.

An important task of mission today is the work of reconciliation. Reconciliation does not start from the offender, the one who created the wounds, the one who had killed. It should start from the victim. In many countries that have suffered genocide, the justice that the victims often receive is the exposition of the truth by which the oppressors are identified. Usually, the publication of such documents is preceded first by a declaration of amnesty; that all those who have killed or maimed will no longer serve time in jail. Is justice served when the only consolation that the victims receive is the names and the admission of guilt of the killers? Reconciliation is often a political act to achieve peace, and the victim may really end up at the losing end, humanly speaking. That’s why the act of reconciliation should begin from the victims. They must be prepared to forgive even if their torturers do not ask for it. The reason for their forgiveness is not their enemies, but themselves. They cannot voluntarily remain in the prison of hatred.

Francis-Xavier Cardinal Nguyen Van Thuan of Vietnam spent 11 years in isolation as a prisoner of the Communist regime. While in prison, he managed to write several books of short quotes, sharing his experiences. Those books, which were made from the smuggled notes from prison, became bestsellers. The Communists were enraged; they changed his guards every week. This was because if the guards stayed for a month, Nguyen ended up making them his friends, allowing him to smuggle the small written notes. When finally set free, he was able to narrate how he engaged his guards. He taught them English, and when finally as friends, his guards would ask him: “Is it true that you have already forgiven us who have caused you to stay here in prison?” Nguyen responded affirmatively. His kindness conquered the hearts of his guards. “A heart that loves,” he wrote, “only loves and manifests only joy.”

That’s what Jesus wants. His best missionaries are the people who, even after passing hard times, still managed to preserve their inner peace and joy. They can only do this if they forgive and pray for all those who are harming them. Their hearts rest in the power of God who can change the worst events in their lives for good. They refused to be victimized by their enemies, putting their trust for justice and mercy instead in God whom they know will never fail them. Their joy thus astounds others—especially their enemies.

— Fr. Tim S. Melliza, SSP

The Second Vatican Council invited Catholics to begin actual ecumenical practices; we should not wait until full communion is restored among the churches. Concrete ecumenical endeavors actually serve to move forward the progress toward Christian unity.

One may cite various concrete steps that can foster the ecumenical movement: (1) we avoid all negative stereotypes or false assumptions about other Christians; (2) dialogues between experts and leaders of various churches are encouraged; (3) members of various churches join mutual projects or initiatives that serve the poor and needy; (4) Christians may join in common prayer when appropriate; and, (5) each church commits itself to its own personal reform, self-renewal, conversion and transformation.

These various practices are encouraged in Unitatis Redintegratio in its second chapter (UR 5-12), entitled: “The Practice of Ecumenism.” There are opportunities to pray together (UR 5-8), learn together (UR 9-11), and work together (UR 12). There are times that praying together with other Christians is both possible and desirable—done with appropriate prudence. Learning together to better appreciate the Christian faith can prove very enriching. Working together to make the world a better place can pave the road toward Christian unity.
Entrance Antiphon
[Ps 13(12):6]
(Recited when there is no opening song)

O Lord, I trust in your merciful love. My heart will rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord who has been bountiful with me.

Greeting
(The sign of the cross is made here)

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Introduction
(These [or similar] words may be used to address the assembly)

P — Jesus tells us today that as God’s children we have to imitate his love, which does not limit itself to good people. As believers, we are not called to remain passive before evil and injustice around us. May this Eucharist be the source of our inspiration and strength in loving our brothers and sisters.

Penitential Act

P — Brethren (brothers and sisters), let us acknowledge our sins and so prepare ourselves to celebrate the sacred mysteries. (Pause)

P — Have mercy on us, O Lord.
All — For we have sinned against you.

P — Show us, O Lord, your mercy.
All — And grant us your salvation.

P — May almighty God have mercy on us, forgive our sins, and bring us to everlasting life.
All — Amen.

Glory

All — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to people of good will. We praise you, we bless you, we adore you, we glorify you, we give you thanks for your great glory, Lord God, heavenly King, O God, almighty Father. Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son, Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us; you take away the sins of the world, receive our prayer; you are seated at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us. For you alone are the Holy One, you alone are the Lord, you alone are the Most High, Jesus Christ, with the Holy Spirit, in the glory of God the Father. Amen.

Collect

P — Let us pray. (Pause)

Grant, we pray, almighty God, that, always pondering spiritual things, we may carry out in both word and deed that which is pleasing to you. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.
All — Amen.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

First Reading [Lv 19:1-2, 17-18] (Sit)
The Lord commanded the Israelites to love their fellow countrymen. Christian love makes no distinction between races, beliefs, and even one’s moral standing.

A reading from the Book of Leviticus

The L ORD said to Moses, “Speak to the whole Israelite community and tell them: Be holy, for I, the L ORD, your God, am holy. You shall not bear hatred for your brother or sister in your heart. Though you may have to reproach your fellow citizen, do not incur sin because of him. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against any of your people. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the L ORD.”

— The word of the Lord.
All — Thanks be to God.

Responsorial Psalm (Ps 103)

R — The Lord is kind and merciful.

1. Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all my being, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. (R)

2. He pardons all your iniquities, heals all your ills. He redeems your life from destruction, crowns you with kindness and compassion. (R)

3. Merciful and gracious is the L ORD, slow to anger and abounding in kindness. Not according to our sins does he deal with us, nor does he requite us according to our crimes. (R)

4. As far as the east is from the west, so far has he put our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the L ORD has compassion on those who fear him. (R)

Second Reading (1 Cor 3:16-23)
The apostle Paul reminds us that the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes us God’s temple. If we are God’s holy dwelling, we ought to respect and love each other.

A reading from the first Letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians

BROTHERS AND SISTERS: Do you not know that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person; for the temple of God, which you are, is holy.

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool, so as to become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in the eyes of God, for it is written: God catches the wise in their own ruses, and again: The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.
So let no one boast about human beings, for everything belongs to you, Paul or Apollos or Cephas, or the world or life or death, or the present or the future: all belong to you, and you to Christ, and Christ to God.

— The word of the Lord.

All — Thanks be to God.

**Alleluia** [1 Jn 2:5] (Stand)

All — Alleluia, alleluia.

Whoever keeps the word of Christ, the love of God is truly perfected in him. Alleluia, alleluia.

**Gospel** (Mt 5:38-48)

P — A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew All — Glory to you, O Lord.

JESUS SAID to his disciples: “You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, offer no resistance to one who is evil. When someone strikes you on your right cheek, turn the other one as well. If anyone wants to go to law with you over your tunic, hand over your cloak as well. Should anyone press you into service for one mile, go for two miles. Give to the one who asks of you, and do not turn your back on one who wants to borrow.

“You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same? So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

— The Gospel of the Lord.

All — Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.
P — Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.
ALL — It is right and just.
P — It is truly right and just, our duty and our salvation, always and everywhere to give you thanks, Lord, holy Father, almighty and eternal God, through Christ our Lord.

For through his Paschal Mystery, he accomplished the marvelous deed, by which he has freed us from the yoke of sin and death, summoning us to the glory of being now called a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for your own possession, to proclaim everywhere your mighty works, for you have called us out of darkness into your own wonderful light.

And so, with Angels and Archangels, with Thrones and Dominions, and with all the hosts and Powers of heaven, we sing the hymn of your glory, as without end we acclaim:

All — Holy, Holy, Holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosanna in the highest. (Kneel)

Acclamation (Stand)

All — Save us, Savior of the world, for by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free.

THE COMMUNION RITE

The Lord’s Prayer

All — Our Father...
P — Deliver us, Lord...
All — For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are yours now and for ever.

Invitation to Peace

Invitation to Communion (Kneel)

P — Behold the Lamb of God, behold him who takes away the sins of the world. Blessed are those called to the supper of the Lamb.
All — Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but only say the word and my soul shall be healed.

Communion Antiphon

(Jn 11:27)

Lord, I have come to believe that you are the Christ, the Son of the living God, who is coming into this world.

Prayer after Communion (Stand)

P — Let us pray. (Pause)
Grant, we pray, almighty God, that we may experience the effects of salvation which is pledged to us by these mysteries.
Through Christ our Lord.
All — Amen.

THE CONCLUDING RITES

P — The Lord be with you.
All — And with your spirit.

Solemn Blessing

P — Bow down for the blessing. (Pause)
May almighty God always keep every adversity far from you and in his kindness pour out upon you the gifts of his blessing.
All — Amen.

P — May God keep your hearts attentive to his words,
that they may be filled with everlasting gladness.
All — Amen.

P — And so, may you always understand what is good and right, and be found every hastening along in the path of God’s commands, made coheirs with the citizens of heaven.
All — Amen.

P — And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, (1) and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you for ever.
All — Amen.

Dismissal

P — Go in peace.
All — Thanks be to God.